



Submitted Testimony

New York State Catholic Conference

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Testimony
of the
New York State Catholic Conference
regarding the
2016 – 2017
Housing Budget

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In the human services arena, the expertise, experience and advice of the Council of Catholic Charities Directors guides the New York State Catholic Conference. Catholic Charities programs exist in all eight dioceses and all 62 counties of the state to provide services to people in need, Catholic and non-Catholic alike.

Our Catholic tradition compels us to be active participants in the civic life of our community, to fashion a more just world that upholds the dignity of every individual and to serve those in need. The Catholic Church in New York State fulfills its mandate to care for the most vulnerable through its vast network of Catholic Charities agencies.

The needs of the poor and vulnerable must not be ignored. A key measure of any society is how the most vulnerable members are cared for; those with the greatest need are due special attention. There is a long history in New York State of government and not-for-profit provider collaboration to deliver services in a cost-effective manner. This public/private partnership in support of the poor and vulnerable must be maintained.

Across the state, Catholic Charities provides food and nutrition programs, adoption and foster care services, housing programs, immigrant and refugee services, emergency assistance, counseling, child care, behavioral health services, developmental disabilities programs, prison ministry and more. Our partnership with the state in serving the poor and vulnerable provides obvious benefit, both to those we serve and to the state.

Governor Cuomo's sixth Executive Budget totals \$145.3 billion, an increase of \$1.71 billion, or 1.2 percent over current levels. This is the sixth budget proposal in which spending growth is kept below 2 percent.

Given the fact that spending is limited on a year-to-year basis, it is important to recognize and advocate for those commitments that are included in the Housing portion of this year's spending plan.

Affordable Housing

First, I would like to address the issue of Affordable Housing. The continuum of safe, affordable housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income families and individuals needs to be preserved and expanded, especially in rural areas. Studies show that one of the leading causes of homelessness is a lack of available affordable housing. The Council of Catholic Charities Directors seeks the expansion of affordable housing for low- and moderate-income families and individuals.

The Catholic Church is a major provider of housing to the poor, including low-wage working people, the elderly, and the people with disabilities in our state and our nation. Our service to these populations reflects the living embodiment of what we call the "preferential option for the poor," which reminds us

that a basic moral test of society is how its most vulnerable members are faring. Today, many families cannot afford decent housing, or must spend so much of their limited income for shelter that they forego other necessities, such as food and medicine. The Council of Catholic Charities Directors support housing policies which seek to preserve and increase the supply of affordable housing and help families pay for it.

In the 2016-2017 Executive Budget, the Governor proposes to create and preserve 100,000 affordable units across the state through House NY 2020. According to his office, this would increase State spending on housing programs by nearly \$5 billion to:

- Build and preserve affordable units and individual homes;
- Make home ownership affordable to first-time buyers;
- Increase investments in the revitalization of our communities;
- Promote housing choice for all New Yorkers;
- Revamp services to better serve clients; and
- Directly support permanent housing programs for those struggling with homelessness.

This is a very ambitious and laudable goal. This is a goal that the Council of Catholic Charities supports. Unfortunately, at the time that these comments were submitted, there was no additional detail provided on how all of this would be accomplished. As a result, we are unable to provide further analysis and comments on this Affordable Housing Plan.

Supportive Housing

One out of every seven homeless people in the United States lives in New York. Statewide there are roughly 67,000 men, women and children who are staying in shelters at any given time. In New York City alone, more than 59,000 people, including 24,000 children sleep in a homeless shelter each night. An additional 7,000 people stay in a shelter outside New York City.

Thousands of others sleep on the streets or in abandoned buildings and makeshift campsites while thousands more exit foster care, hospitals and other institutions each year without a home. Homelessness in New York has nearly doubled in the last decade. New York State must end this crisis and invest in the most cost-effective strategy proven to solve homelessness for those with the greatest needs – supportive housing, which pairs affordable housing with on-site supportive services.

This past fall, the NYS Council of Catholic Charities Directors joined scores of other housing advocates in the Campaign 4 NY/NY which called on Governor Cuomo to work with New York City and the other localities with large and growing homeless populations across the state, to create 35,000 units of supportive housing over the next 10 years (30,000 units in New York City and 5,000 units

outside of New York City). We are pleased to see that Governor Cuomo and NYC Mayor de Blasio both have included in their spending plans resources to expand supportive housing by 35,000 units over 15 years.

The Governor's FY 2017 budget proposes a \$10.4 billion plan to combat homelessness over the next five years to add:

- 6,000 new supportive housing beds;
- 1,000 emergency shelter beds; and
- A variety of expanded homelessness services over the next five years.

The budget story also references an additional 14,000 units of supportive housing units are planned for in future years, but since the Capital Plan is only for five years and these units are not anticipated to start until six years from now, there is no financial commitment linked to this proposal.

It is imperative that a financial commitment to these 14,000 units be included in the enacted budget for FY 2017. Why? Supportive housing reduces homelessness, improves neighborhoods, and saves tax dollars. And it does it because of the combination of stable housing with the support services that help a person remain housed. So funding both capital development and support services is critical.

By almost every measure, supportive housing has been a success. It has:

- Reduced the use of shelters, hospitals, psychiatric centers and incarceration, for an average net public savings of \$10,100 per unit per year;
- Decreased chronic homelessness among single adults by 47 percent in the first five years of the NY/NY III agreement;
- Provided stability, as more than 86 percent of NY/NY III tenants remain housed after one year; and
- Raised real estate values for properties located closest to supportive housing developments.

Improving Homeless Shelter Conditions

Citing the fact that some 2,508 health and safety violations have been identified in shelters across the state, the Governor is also calling for an audit of the state's shelter system. He has tasked Comptroller DiNapoli to audit shelters statewide; Comptroller Stringer to audit New York City shelters; and Comptroller Schroeder to review Buffalo shelters. Shelters determined to be unsafe or dangerous will add police protection or close. Shelters that are unsanitary or otherwise unfit will be subject to contract

cancellation, operator replacement or closure. If management is the problem, a receiver can be appointed. Finally, local social services districts not complying with laws and regulations will be subject to sanction.

Again, we have not seen any bill language on this proposal at the time that we submitted this testimony. Therefore, we cannot comment any further on this proposal. Obviously, we want our shelters to be safe and clean for the men, women and children that rely on shelters as their homes. Our supposition is that shelter providers, like most not-for-profit agencies, are struggling mightily to maintain their facilities and programs given the lack of state support allocated for social services programs over the past six years.

Conclusion

It is our hope that humane and wise budget decisions will be made that do not add further stress and hopelessness to those already struggling with great burden. The State Legislature has a history of identifying services that are essential to their constituents and finding a way to address these needs. We can and must find a way to arrive at a result that does not further jeopardize the poor and vulnerable members of our society – a budget that affirms the dignity of all our state's people.

Thank you.

